



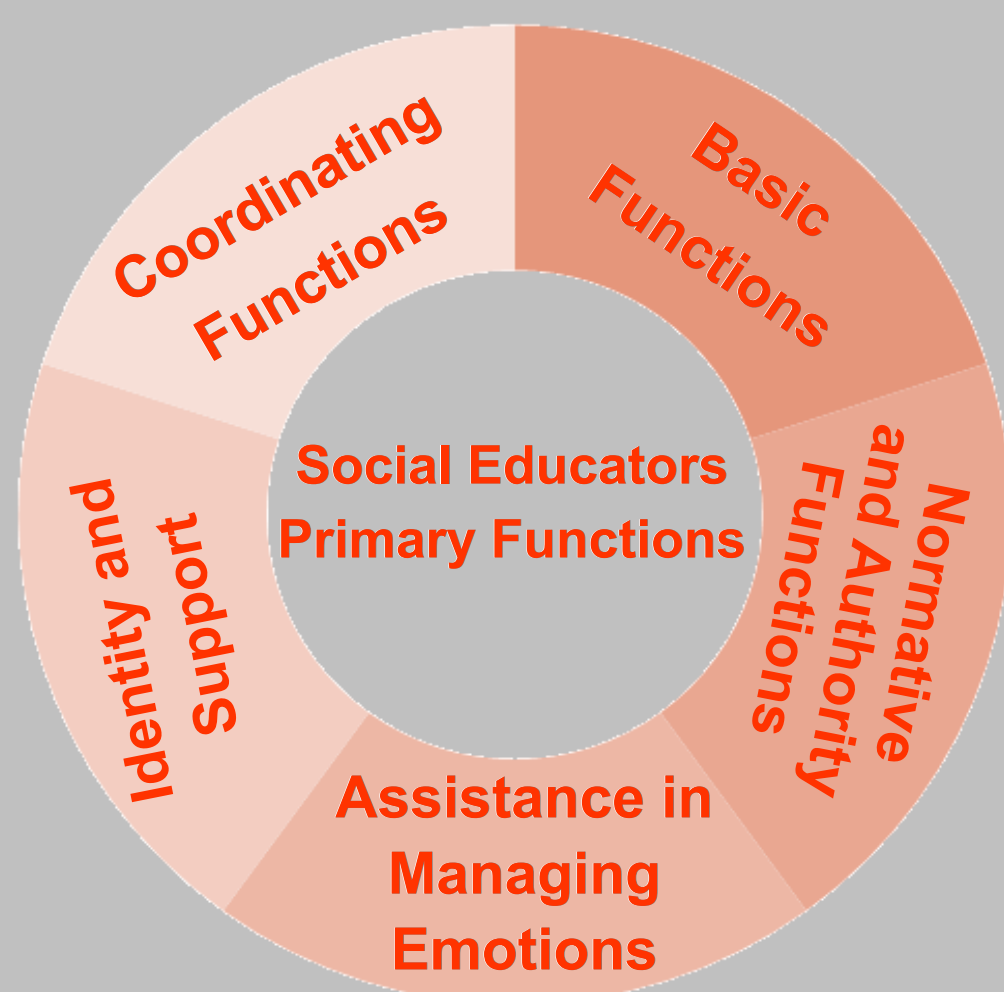
Social Education is a decades old profession in Europe that offers a proven guide for future Social Educators in Puerto Rico. By definition, a Social Educator works towards the integration of people who have been excluded from the benefits of society. "Social Education, as a concept, profession and action is crucial to restore equitable balance for marginalized people of the educational, social and economic system which is mandated by society". (ASEDES, 2007).

With Social Education as a guide, we intend to identify the need for the profession of Social Educator. **Is the profession of Social Educator necessary in Puerto Rico?** Six (6) Alternative School teachers and principals, education opinion-leaders and executives from the Department of Education were interviewed (semi-structured) and asked this question. In particular, they were asked if Puerto Rico's Alternative Schools could benefit from this professional. Alternative Schools attend students that have left the public school system. These schools represent an innovative approach to teaching and learning that is consonant with the needs and aspirations of these students. However, there is no training program for these professionals to work in Alternative Schools. As part of the development of a future academic program, this research entails the introduction of the Social Educator, as a protagonist in the development of an education strategy that will curb school abandonment in the regular system schools and provide formal training for Alternative Schools.

Why Social Education for youth that have abandoned school?

They have been disconnected and excluded from the educational, economic and social (cultural) benefits of society. The disconnection and exclusion requires the development of new social skills in order to reconnect and participate in society. Disconnection and exclusion makes Social Education a required tool that helps in forming "behavioral patterns of coexistence, such as democratic mentality, tolerance, participation and responsibility for the common good," in addition to behaviors that "promote love for peace and respect for interculturalism, the environment and diversity." (Quintana in Petrus, 1997)

Social Education reinforces the value that education and learning as a social activity especially when it is done in the context of a community. "Man becomes a person only when he has developed a spirit in the context of social experience." (Mead 1973 in Petrus, 1997). This process is done through the work in key areas of the person's life. "The process of socialization is attributed to four main functions: to transmit norms and culture, creating habits of social behavior, preparing for the world of work and develop the personality of the citizen." (Petrus, 1997)



This regulated profession allows for Social Educators to work outside and inside of the classroom. Their primary functions (Pérez, 2009) are structured as part of the intervention plan with each student:

- **Coordinating Functions** - educators, youth, activities and programs
- **Basic Functions** - a group of activities that facilitate the care of hygiene, nutrition, dress, protection and special attention to the self
- **Normative and Authority Functions** - the teaching and understanding of rules and values; explores modes of participation in community
- **Assistance in Managing Emotions** - medium by which the person develops skills to communicate and addresses conflict and tensions
- **Identity and Support** - helps with school work issues, culture and use of free time, provides skills and means to access the learning process

Developing social maturity and the social skills to have positive human relations and live in community entails an awareness of the person's own life objectives, as well as the common objective for the collective (school, community, country). This process requires self-control and the acceptance of the student's own behavior and responsibility for their contribution to the process.

Social Education provides a framework for Alternative Schools in the preparation of their teachers. Social Education is present today in Europe's 27 member states. Universities in over 10 countries and Spain offer university degrees, undergraduate and graduate, in Social Education.

All professionals interviewed coincided with the need to have Social Educators in Puerto Rico. They understood that the Social Educator is needed because:

- There is a void of psychological-social support inside and outside the classroom for students.
- Educators lack the tools to address the student's context and psychological-social needs in the context of the classroom.
- Some educators believe that addressing the values of social maturity, positive relations and living in community is not part of their work but rather issues to be addressed by Counselors, Social Workers or other support school staff.
- The psychological-social needs of students and youth are not being addressed in regular schools with the existing professional staff (Counselors, Social Workers, etc.) – primarily due to more demand than professional on staff to attend to them.
- The existing curriculum and many of traditional teaching methods in the regular school do not promote Social Education, i.e., the social maturity, positive relations or learning to live in community. A new curriculum approach would aid in promoting Social Education principles throughout the curriculum.

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